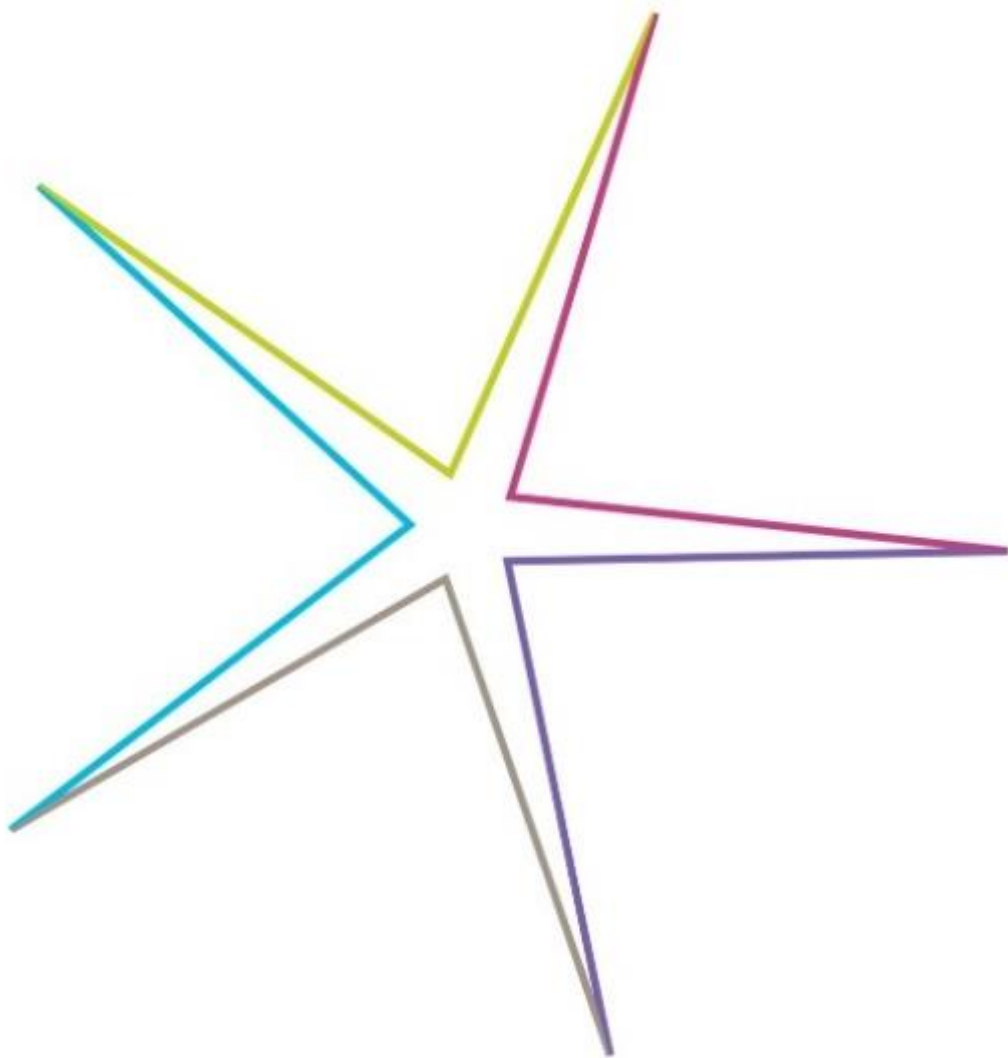


College Quality Handbook 2019





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1. Understanding the Quality Landscape

1.1 Sector Agencies

In your role, you will encounter a number of different sector agencies, all of whom have a remit, or aspects of their work, relating to quality assurance and enhancement. Your interaction with these agencies will vary; you may have regular contact with some, and more limited contact with others, but it is useful for you to know who they are and what they do.

We asked five of the main agencies three questions (and also completed them for sparqs) to help you get to know us all better:

1. Who they are and their overall role and remit.
2. Their role in quality and why it is important.
3. The role of students within their work.

student partnerships in quality Scotland

Who we are

student partnerships in quality Scotland (sparqs) is a publicly-funded agency for Scotland's university and college sectors which aims to support student engagement in the quality of the learning experience. We are funded by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) to advance education by promoting an environment where students are able to make a positive and rewarding difference to their own and others' educational experience. We support students to shape the nature of their learning and contribute to the overall success of learning provision, regardless of wherever and however they learn.

Our role in quality

Quality is at the heart of everything we do; our mission states that we want to "Foster a culture of partnership between students and staff which enables the Scottish education sector to respond to challenges and realise its ambitions to provide the best possible experience for each and every student." As such, our work focuses on empowering and supporting students to be partners in all aspects of quality. We provide training for student officers and students' association staff to help enable this, as well as a number of resources, including guidance and toolkits to help support them in their roles.

We have representation on most sector committees that have a quality remit, including CDN's Quality Development Network Steering Group and the SFC's Learning Enhancement Committee (see page 9 for more details). We maintain strong working relationships with other sector agencies, such as our work with Education Scotland supports the How good is our college? (HGIOC) Framework.

The role of students

Students play a key role in the work of sparqs; we have student members on our College Advisory Group and University Advisory Group, as well as our Members Steering Group, which guides the direction of sparqs and our work. Our work is developed with students in mind, to help support them in their role and to enable them to be partners in their own education. We work closely with other sector agencies to facilitate student engagement with the quality arrangements and sector committees. We also support students and institutional staff from universities and colleges across Scotland and internationally to develop stronger partnership working within their own institutions.



Scottish Funding Council

Who we are

The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) is a public body which invests around £1.8 billion of public money each year on behalf of the Scottish Government. SFC's funding enables Scotland's colleges and universities to provide education opportunities for over half a million people, and to invest in research and innovation. SFC has a range of statutory functions, which include a specific statutory responsibility for quality assurance in colleges and universities.

Our role in quality

SFC has a statutory responsibility for quality assurance in colleges and universities. This involves ensuring that baseline quality standards are being met in all publicly funded colleges and HE institutions in Scotland. We hold colleges and universities to account for their performance. We report to Scottish Government, students and the public on the performance of institutions overall, including the quality of provision.

SFC contracts Education Scotland to provide external assurance and support improvement in the college sector; and QAA Scotland to provide external assurance and support enhancement in the higher education sector. All institutions in Scotland are above baseline quality standards, as Scotland has an excellent system of further and higher education, and SFC's expectation, therefore, is that colleges and universities will strive to continuously enhance their provision. SFC works in partnership with the sectors and learners to support continuous improvement of the quality of all aspects of the learner experience.

The role of students

A partnership approach with learners is a fundamental expectation of SFC's approach. We work at national level with sparqs and NUS on all aspects of the learner experience, and also provide funding to sparqs. We expect institutions to fully involve their students in all aspects of the learner experience.

National Union of Students Scotland

Who we are

The work of NUS Scotland has been crucial in shaping public life in Scotland. We strive for an education system in colleges and universities that supports students to enjoy their time, succeed in their chosen field and to be partners in their education.

NUS Scotland is the national campaigning organisation for students in Scotland – we represent over 500,000 students at college and university in Scotland. We promote, defend and extend the rights of students, and work to develop and champion strong students' associations. Whether that's through providing a chance for you to network with your peers across Scotland, celebrating best practice through the NUS Scotland Education Awards, or by leading the fight against TEF in Scotland to defend our unique quality arrangements. NUS Scotland is the collective movement that makes change happen.

Our role in quality

NUS Scotland passionately believes that the learner voice and partnership with students drives positive change and innovation in teaching and learning. Along with our member students' associations, we're fighting to defend Scotland from the effects of the marketisation of education that we've seen in England. We reject the increase in metrics and fees that we've seen in other parts of the UK, and continue to advocate to keep the learner voice at the heart of our education system.



To us, a good education system goes beyond just getting student feedback, and instead asks learners to co-design, co-produce and co-evaluate their environment, moving beyond learning and teaching to encompass the whole institution. In a changing education landscape we must create and drive the development of new models of learner voice that deliver quality, underpinned by principles of partnership and collectivism. We want to achieve a culture shift that puts learners at the heart of teaching and learning. The idea that students are experts in their learning, and in their wider lives, underpins all of our work. We believe that students should be supported to positively change their experiences both in the classroom, and outside of it.

Over the last few years we have:

- Campaigned to diversify the curriculum, highlighting the need for an end to reading lists which do not reflect the diverse student body.
- Won an extra £21million per year investment in student bursary support.
- Received funding to develop strong, sustainable, college students' associations.
- Supported students to engage in Gender Action Plans – tackling the gender imbalance in our education system.

The role of students

All of our work is led by students. Every year students from colleges and universities across Scotland gather together to discuss and debate policy and elect their student leaders at a national level. This is a chance for students to shape our work by bringing forward their ideas about the work that should be taken forward nationally, and how we should deliver on those objectives.

College Development Network

Who we are

College Development Network (CDN) supports the development of college staff, resources and approaches to learning. We do this by leading thinking through events, workshops and networks; creating opportunities for innovation, continuous professional development and networking and sharing of practices in all aspects of college work. We work for the college sector, as part of the sector, reacting to the needs of the sector quickly and effectively.

Our role in quality

Our team of professionals and specialists offer a wealth of knowledge and experience. We typically host 300 events and meetings annually, for over 6000 delegates; we reach about 1000 people through our video conferencing, webinars and professional learning platform; and our 22 Development Networks, including our Quality Network, engage with over 4000 staff every year. CDN holds guardianship of the Professional Standards for lecturers in Scotland's colleges. Our CPD Frameworks support high standards in management, leadership and continuous professional learning. We offer a range of workshops, including governance workshops for College Board members. In addition, we are happy to offer bespoke workshops for colleges.

The role of students

Student organisations and students play a significant role in how we are rethinking our programme of work for the coming years. They will be central to a number of new activities that CDN will be undertaking, like promoting key career paths or embedding Gender Actions Plans in colleges. We have also re-gearred many of our events to more closely engage students, such as the introduction of the College Expo for Scotland, a national event with hundreds of activities, with both college staff and students as the core audiences. Students play a starring role in the design and evaluation of such programmes.



Education Scotland

Who we are

Education Scotland is a Scottish Government executive agency charged with supporting quality and improvement in Scottish education and thereby securing the delivery of better learning experiences and outcomes for Scottish learners of all ages. Our status as an executive agency means that we operate independently and impartially, whilst remaining directly accountable to Scottish Government ministers for the standards of our work. This status safeguards the independence of inspection, review and reporting within the overall context of the National Performance Framework. Education Scotland's Chief Executive is responsible to Scottish ministers, within the terms of the framework document, for its management, performance, and future development.

Our role in quality

During 2017, new and significantly revised quality arrangements and an associated framework were introduced for colleges in Scotland. 'How good is our college?' (HGIOC) is an innovative and forward-looking framework that both builds on the existing effective internal quality arrangements within colleges and aligns with Education Scotland quality arrangements for other sectors. The framework also recognises and responds to the extensive changes experienced by the college sector over recent years and takes account of the SFC's arrangements for Regional Outcome Agreements. We are currently in a development phase and acknowledgement has been given to the need for the SFC, Education Scotland and colleges to have the time to plan, implement and adapt to working with the new arrangements. Through the use of HGIOC, colleges and their stakeholders identify what is working well and what needs to improve. The framework is based on the four high-level principles (which in turn are underpinned by challenge questions and quality indicators):

- Leadership and quality culture.
- Delivery of learning and services to support learning.
- Outcomes and impact.
- Capacity for improvement.

In responding to these principles, each college produces an Evaluative Report and an associated Enhancement Plan (EREP). These describe the methodology and approaches taken to evaluation and the context in which the evaluation was carried out. Colleges are required to retain all information used to support the evaluation processes, and where relevant, the allocation of grades. During this development phase, Education Scotland inspectors provide support and challenge to college staff in their understanding of the principles and approaches behind the new arrangements. The evidence gathered is used to evaluate the accuracy and appropriateness of the college-devised EREPs and associated proposed grading outcomes. Submitted reports are subject to independent scrutiny and endorsement procedures.

The arrangements place the role of the college HMI at the centre to:

- Provide support and challenge to the college to produce an accurate and balanced EREP which is underpinned by a sound evidence base.
- Design and deliver appropriate training to staff and key stakeholders to engage in the new arrangements.



- Provide effective liaison with key, relevant Education Scotland and SFC colleagues, including Education Scotland Area Lead Officers and Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) Development Officers.
- Collaborate with relevant HMI.
- Maintain appropriate records of engagement with colleges and relevant stakeholders; liaise and collaborate with Lead Officers to advise of additional input requirements, including Associate Assessors, subject and cross-college specialists, Student Team Members and Area Lead Officers. Liaise and collaborate with college learner representatives to ensure appropriate learner input.

The role of students

As learners are the key stakeholders in colleges, it is important that they have appropriate opportunities to inform and influence both the Evaluative Report and the Enhancement Plan. Education Scotland will ask colleges to identify a senior manager with a comprehensive strategic overview to fulfil the role of college nominee. The nominee will play a key role in co-ordinating ongoing engagement with Education Scotland and SFC and preparation of the EREP.

The inclusion of a college nominee in ongoing engagement aims to:

- Reinforce and support partnership working between the college, Education Scotland, SFC and key stakeholders, in assuring and improving the quality of provision and services.
- Help establish a culture of partnership, openness and transparency in evaluating and reporting on the quality of provision and services.
- Provide a point of reference for Education Scotland and SFC staff prior to, during and after engagement activities.
- Provide a point of reference for college staff, learners and key partners prior to, during and after engagement activities.

Colleges Scotland

Who we are

Colleges Scotland is the membership body for all 26 colleges in Scotland, spread across 13 regions. Our role is to promote and represent the interests of the college sector in Scotland, and we strive to create cohesive and sustainable partnerships, demonstrate positive impact, act as representatives, and campaign for the sector and aim to be at the heart of a world class college sector that is recognised, valued and available to all.

Our role in quality

As we continue to develop our role in the college sector, and as the Employers' Association, the focus will be on enabling colleges to deliver the best opportunities for those learners in colleges in Scotland. As the collective voice of the sector, our role is to provide a consistent and compelling case for Scotland's colleges and to use our influence to ensure that they are in a position to provide quality education choices to Scotland's people, long into the future.

The role of students

We continue to work in partnership with a number of student-facing sector agencies including College Development Network (CDN) and in consultation with stakeholders such as NUS Scotland and sparqs.



1.2 Sector Committees

There are a number of committees that you may have the opportunity to get involved with, all of which have different responsibilities relating to quality across the sector. As well as the committees detailed below, it is worth keeping an eye out for any short-life working groups that sparqs, NUS Scotland or College Development Network may run as additional opportunities to get involved.

CDN Quality Development Network Steering Group provides a forum for staff operating in colleges across Scotland to meet on a formal and informal basis. This group allows its members to exchange information, network, and provide a specialist perspective and to undertake professional debate on a range of issues which impact on the themes of quality. The group also encourages, devises and supports continuing professional development activity for members, as well as acting as a consultative body on agreed topics of sector interest and providing formal responses on behalf of the colleges across Scotland to sector agencies when requested.

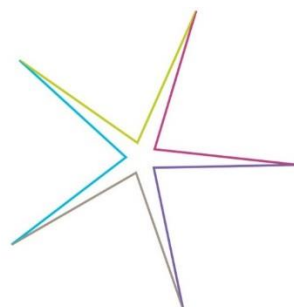
CDN Strategic Curriculum Leaders Forum is a forum that discusses some of the big topics in the sector, such as retention, progression and attainment. sparqs is keen to see student involvement in these discussions, where relevant.

CDN Development Committee is used to inform the CDN strategy and priorities and gathers intelligence to inform the design, development and delivery of CDN services. It facilitates effective engagement with the college regions and key stakeholders, ensuring quality and relevance to meet colleges' emerging priorities and development needs.

Learning Enhancement Committee is the SFC's group which is committed to enhancing the student learning experience in Scotland's colleges and universities. The purpose of the LEC is to provide advice and guidance to the SFC Board on strategies for ensuring that students receive an inspiring, high quality education, which equips them with the knowledge and skills to participate effectively to Scotland's economic, social, and cultural success.

Learner Journey Review - the 15 to 24 Learner Journey Review, was set up by the Scottish Government in 2016 and considered the learner journey from the senior phase (S4-S6) leading to employment, including the stages of further and higher education in college, higher education in university, vocational training and apprenticeships. The Scottish Government published a [Learner Journey Review Report](#) in May 2018 which presents the findings of the review and recommendations following evidence gathering and stakeholder engagement. The programme's vision is to ensure all learners are on the right route to the right job, through the right course via the right information. There are two drivers for the review: learner personalisation and choice, and system efficiency.

This group will now become the **Learner Journey Implementation Group**, which exists to advise the Scottish Government in its implementation of the recommendations derived from evidence gathering, aimed at increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the learner journey.





1.3 College Governance and Legislation

Policy and Legislation

The responsibilities for students' associations are mainly set out in the 1994 Education Act (UK) and 2013 Post-16 Education Act (Scotland).

- Colleges must have a students' association
- Boards must have two student members (two minimum)
- Boards must approve the Students' Association's:
 - ✓ accounts on an annual basis.
 - ✓ constitution every five years.
- Boards must ensure:
 - ✓ democratic elections for key officers.
 - ✓ meaningful engagement with students.

College Governance

Every college in Scotland is governed by a Board, which has responsibility and oversight of the planning and delivery of learning, and for value for money. The Code of Good Governance (revised 2016) is developed and owned by the sector, and colleges are required to comply with it as a condition of grant from either SFC or their regional strategic body. It establishes standards of good governance practice for all boards and provides the essential foundations for compliance within the legislative framework.

Section B of the framework, Quality of the Student Experience, sets the expectations for student engagement in college governance and the Board:

- B.1 The board must have close regard to the voice of its students and the quality of the student experience should be central to all board decisions.
- B.2 The board must lead by example in relation to openness, by ensuring that there is meaningful ongoing engagement and dialogue with students and the students' association in relation to the quality of the student experience.
- B.3 The board must consider the outcome of student surveys and other student engagements, and monitor action plans that could impact on the quality of the student experience.
- B.4 The college board must have regard to the Framework for the Development of Strong and Effective College Students' Associations in Scotland. It must put in place robust partnership procedures (e.g. partnership agreement) to work together to achieve change and which are supported by regular and open communications.
- B.5 The college board must encourage a strong and autonomous students' association and ensure that the students' association is adequately resourced.
- B.6 The college board must ensure that the students' association operates in a fair and democratic manner and fulfils its responsibilities.
- B.7 The college board must review the written constitution of its students' association at least every five years.

All College Board Members in Scotland (including student members) are expected to attend training on how to undertake their role successfully. These workshops are organised by the College Development Network and provide a comprehensive induction to college boards. Topics covered include: duties and responsibilities of the board and what an effective board looks like. sparqs and NUS Scotland deliver a session on the importance of students' associations and student engagement for the Board. Student Board Members also receive additional training for the role from NUS Scotland.



1.4 How good is our college? (HGIOC)

Developed by the SFC and Education Scotland, and first published in December 2016, How Good is Our College? (known as HGIOC, and pronounced "higgy-ock") is the college quality framework. Under the framework, colleges moved away from the traditional external inspection approach, and towards a self-evaluative model of review with external validation provided by Education Scotland and the SFC.

The framework asks colleges to be forward thinking to explore and anticipate new and emerging priorities and to draw on this to plan future provision and services. The Education Scotland virtuous cycle of improvement is relevant to all sectors of education in Scotland. It illustrates the key features of evidence-based self-improvement at organisational and at system-wide levels. It shows how leaders can empower practitioners to interpret nationally shared aims, such as the principles of Curriculum for Excellence, and the aims of Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) and apply them to local contexts in ways which are most appropriate to them. It is designed to help practitioners draw on evidence-based internal and external evaluation to inform further improvement. For more information see the [How good is our college? Framework](#)



During the academic year 2017-18, all colleges carried out a self-evaluation resulting in an Evaluative Report and Enhancement Plan (EREP). All reports and plans are on Education Scotland's website, and you should take the time to read your college's EREP. The Evaluative Report is essentially an account of progress in relation to Outcome Agreement priorities and a self-evaluation of quality assurance measured against a range of quality indicators (QIs). The Enhancement Plan provides an opportunity for colleges to set out an agenda for improvement. Colleges are expected to demonstrate how learners have been engaged in the development of these documents.



Building on the significant work to date and colleges' EREPs, Education Scotland and the SFC will begin a programme of progress visits with colleges from September 2019 to evaluate progress being made against the ambitions set out in their Enhancement Plans. These progress visits will be in addition to the usual ongoing engagement visits carried out by Education Scotland and the SFC which enable communication and continuous engagement.

During the course of the academic year, Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI's), in conjunction with the SFC, will undertake a progress visit (PV) for each college. PVs will focus on three key areas:

- Outcomes and impact.
- Delivery of services to support learning.
- Leadership and quality culture.

They will be planned collaboratively between the college, Education Scotland and the SFC. The team carrying out the progress visit will engage with staff, students and other stakeholders and produce a summary report for each college which will be shared with the Principal, College Board and the SFC. Progress visits, along with ongoing engagement visits, will also enable the identification and sharing of highly effective practice to support colleges on their journey to improvement.

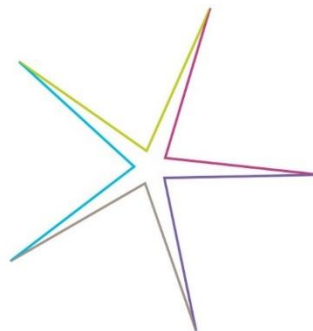
During 2019-20, colleges should use the summary report issued after the progress visit to refresh their Enhancement Plans. For October 2019, colleges will be asked to complete an Annual Report for the SFC. A template, which was co-created with the sector, will be provided to colleges to simplify and streamline reporting. Going forward, colleges will be expected to produce their next full EREP in 2020.

Student engagement in self-evaluation

It is expected that there will be active participation by students in self-evaluative activities. At a bare minimum this will take the form of students as 'information providers', supplying feedback to the college. Aspirational practice would be where students and students' associations are engaged as partners in quality, with students and staff jointly owning evaluative activities and planning improvements together.

Student engagement in the Evaluative Report and Enhancement Plan

In the Evaluative Report and Enhancement Plan, colleges are expected to evidence how they have gathered and used internal and external stakeholder feedback to inform and substantiate evaluations for each of the three high-level principles. This should include how well the college has gathered feedback from the students' association, student representatives and students in its self-evaluative activities. Colleges should also evidence how they plan to engage their students in future development activities in the Enhancement Plan. It is good practice for the college to encourage input to the EREP from the students' association, e.g. by enabling the students' association to write a section or sharing drafts for comment.



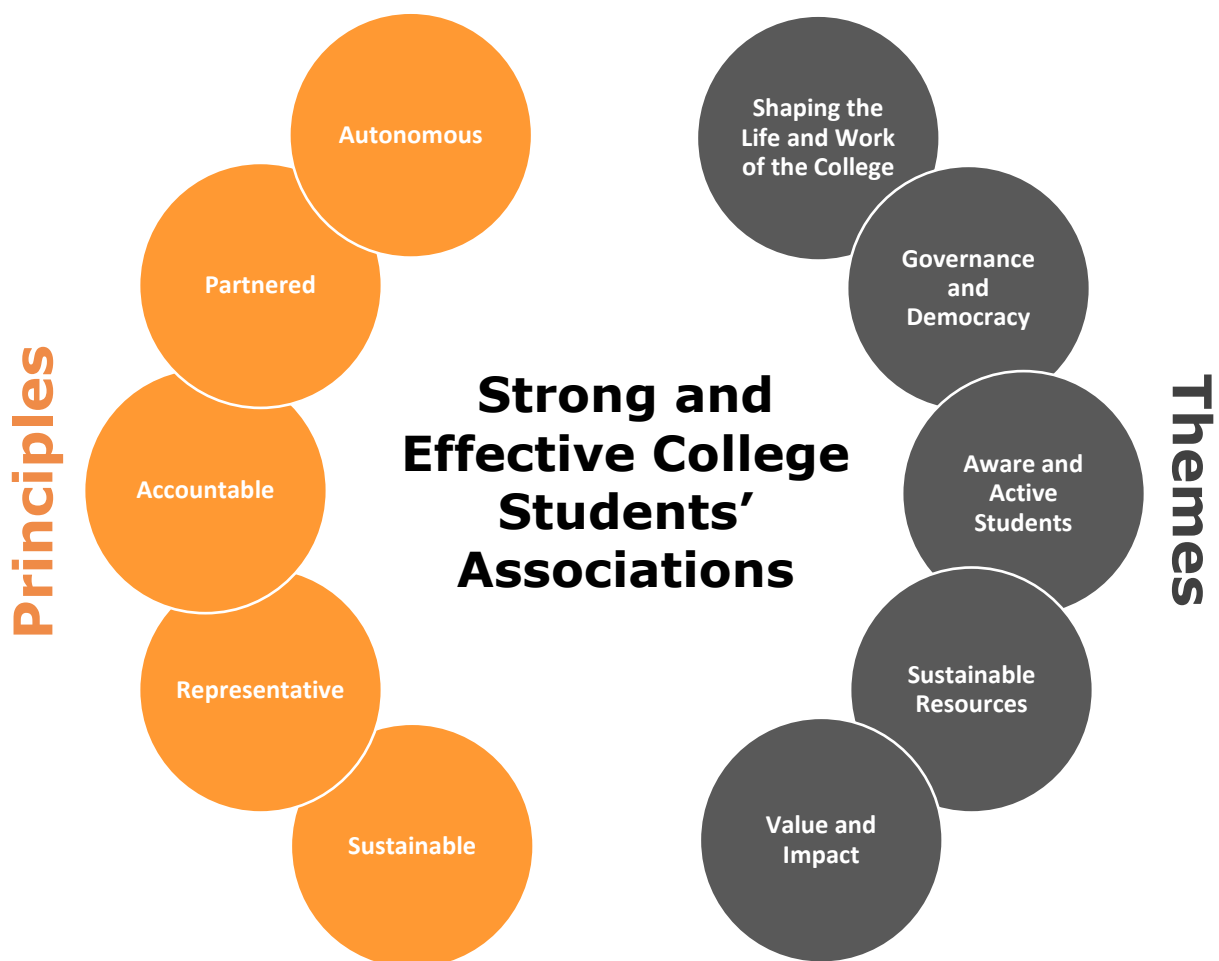


1.5 College Students' Associations Framework

The [Framework for the Development of Strong and Effective College Students' Associations in Scotland](#) was published and launched in June 2015. It was developed by the Scottish Government, NUS Scotland, the Scottish Funding Council, is endorsed by Colleges Scotland and had significant input from sparqs throughout. It was developed following the [2012 Griggs Report](#) recommendation which set out a series of principles which it recommended for students' associations in the regionalised college sector. The report said students' associations should be **sustainable, autonomous** and **appropriately funded**.

The Framework sets out how colleges and students' associations can work in partnership, with the support of sector agencies and NUS Scotland, to develop strong and effective students' associations. The Framework is housed on a dedicated [SA Framework website](#), which contains supporting documentation, including a [Self-Evaluation and Development Planning Tool](#), useful links and information around the continued support offered by NUS Scotland and sparqs.

The Framework has **five principles** which together make up the foundations of strong, effective students' associations and a culture which enables students' associations to thrive. There are also **five themes**, which are the practical steps and actions that students' associations need to take in order to embed the principles and to represent the interests of their students effectively.





1.6 Outcome Agreements

Outcome Agreements set out what colleges and universities plan to deliver in return for their funding and how the institution meets Scottish Government priorities. They are managed by the SFC, on behalf of the Scottish Government. SFC Outcome Agreement Managers are responsible for working with institutions to negotiate the agreements, and it is expected that students are involved in the process. You can find out who your institution's Outcome Agreement Manager is [on the SFC website](#).

Ministers have called for the 'intensification' of the Outcome Agreement process to continue in 2019-20 to secure greater progress with priority outcomes, and indicated that this should include:

- The setting of more ambitious and challenging targets.
- Encouragement of engagement and collaboration.
- Improved transparency and accountability on institutional performance.
- More dynamic allocation of funding to drive and incentivise improvement.

[The Ministerial Letter of Guidance](#) (July 2019) sets out the Scottish Government's strategic objectives for the Scottish Funding Council. Its ambition is of a fully aligned and coherent education and skills system which delivers the best student experience. It states that the SFC should ensure education is accessible to learners from all backgrounds, gives them a high-quality learning experience, supports them to succeed in their studies, and equips them to flourish in employment, further study and fulfilling lives. Some examples of priority areas over the coming year include:

- Fair access to education for people from the widest range of backgrounds, including continued progress on implementing the recommendations of the Commission on Widening Access and addressing gender balance among student intakes for some key subjects.
- Supporting student mental health and wellbeing. This includes all institutions developing a mental health strategy and working with their students' association, and the NUS Scotland Think Positive project to develop a Student Mental Health Agreement.
- Student Engagement - develop further the engagement of students' association representatives in the development of 2020-21 Outcome Agreements, to ensure the lived experience of students informs, and is embedded in, individual Outcome Agreements and their monitoring.

Colleges are required to consult with their students' association; in line with this, the SFC expects colleges to summarise how – from the outset of the process and throughout – their Outcome Agreements have been developed in consultation with students, the university's students' association, staff, and trade union representatives.

Your role will include involvement in conversations with key staff when your institution's Outcome Agreement is being discussed and developed; this may include attending meetings to find out more about the process, or how your institution is reviewing activity relating to the previous Outcome Agreement.

You should also be able to see drafts of the Outcome Agreement as it is developed and attend meetings with your institution's Outcome Agreement Managers where possible. You might find it useful to view your institution's previous Outcome Agreements, which you can find on the SFC website.

SFC also produce guidance for Colleges on Outcome Agreements; '[Guidance for the development of College Outcome Agreements: 2019-20 to 2021-22](#)'.



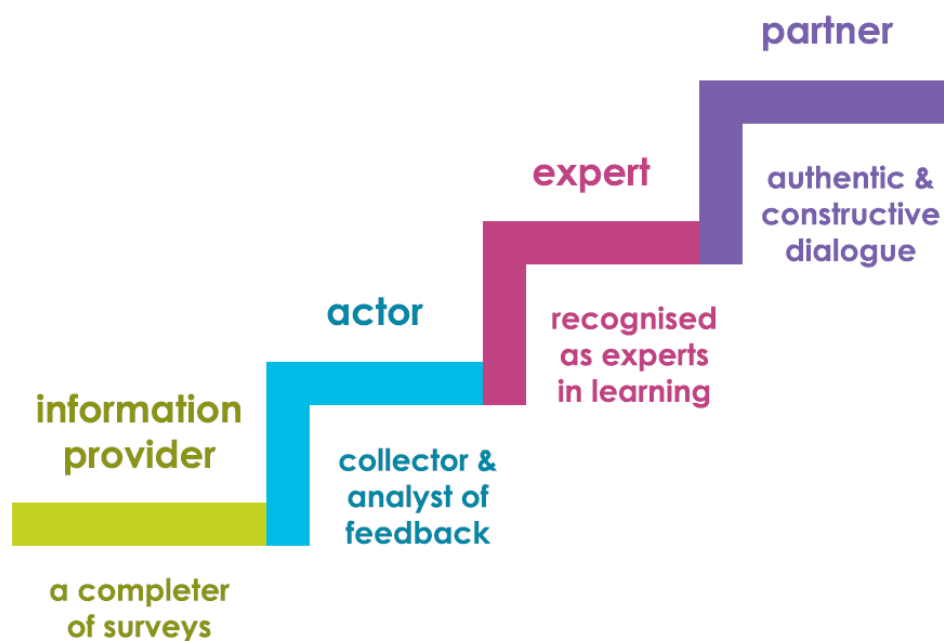
2. A Partnership Approach

2.1 Student Engagement Framework

[A Student Engagement Framework for Scotland](#) (available in the Resource Library on the *sparqs* website) is a document endorsed and owned by all the sector agencies and representative bodies in the college and university sectors. The Framework consists of five key elements of student engagement, and six features of effective student engagement. It offers a coherent and detailed way of understanding student engagement that can be helpful to institutions and students' associations as they attempt to develop and plan their student engagement activities.

2.2 Students as Partners

The ladder below looks at the different roles students play when they engage in dialogue around their learning and teaching, from the more basic 'information provider', to true partner. This is a useful tool to think about the different roles of students in your own institution, and how you can work towards a more meaningful partnership approach.



2.3 Student Partnership Agreements

Many institutions now have Student Partnership Agreements (SPAs) or equivalent documents in place with their students' associations. SPAs set out the relationship between the students' association and the college and identify a number of jointly-agreed priority areas for enhancing the student learning experience. These priority areas will have been decided upon as a result of looking at a range of evidence and will have gone through a process of consultation with students, and so should give a good indication of what matters to the student body.

Further information about SPAs is available in *sparqs'* [Guidance for the development and implementation of a Student Partnership Agreement in colleges](#) (accessible in the Resource Library on the *sparqs* website).



2.4 Responding to Diversity

The student population is diverse, as is the nature of institutions – mechanisms for engagement should acknowledge this diversity to enable all those who wish to engage regardless of their background. When considering diversity, we need to pay attention to protected characteristics as covered by equalities legislation, mode and level of study and socio-economic background and related aspects of widening access.

[sparqs Strategic Plan 2019-22](#) is shaped by our strategic priorities; two of those priorities are 'Diverse Voices' and 'Diverse Settings'. What this means is that we will focus on supporting all student voices to be heard and for those voices to have a positive impact on learning, whilst also identifying settings where capturing the student voice will enhance decision making, particularly where this voice is not currently heard well and where it will help address challenges such as transitions across the learner journey, widening access, and retention and success.

Understanding your student population, and as such, the students that you represent is vital in your role. Capturing that diverse voice from your diverse student population can be challenging, so you will need to consider some of the opportunities and barriers for engagement that your students might have. You can access information around student demographics through national publications by the SFC, or you may be able to request this information through your institution. This will depend on whether you have a data sharing agreement or if data is readily available to you. Contact your students' association staff member in the first instance or a member of the quality team to find out a bit more about your student body demographics.

Things to consider:

- Ask your SA staff member or quality contact about the demographics of your student body.
- Think about what data you have access to which could help you understand the diversity of your student body.
- Are there particular student voices which you think you hear well? Are there others which are harder to hear?
- What could you do to hear these voices better?
- Are your focus groups representative?

2.5 The College Improvement Project

Launched in 2017, the College Improvement Project, aims to improve retention and raise attainment in FE in colleges through taking a quality improvement approach to developing evidence-based practice. Five colleges across Scotland were involved in the pilot project (Dundee & Angus College, Edinburgh College, Inverness College, New College Lanarkshire, and West College Scotland) and formed improvement teams for the academic years 2017-18 and 2018-19. Their role was to determine what things have the biggest impact on the learner experience and which of these could be tested and adapted by other colleges to the benefit of the sector as a whole.

Supported by the Scottish Government, and with additional support from sparqs to involve students in the project, colleges have been engaging their staff and students to try out new approaches to improving practice with a focus on three specific themes:

- Services to Support Learning.
- Engaging in College Life.
- Teaching and Learning – colleges as learning organisations.



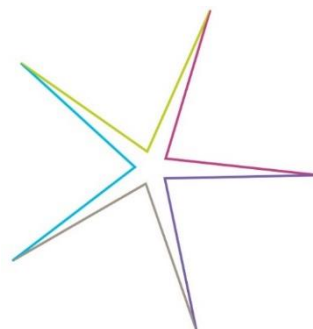
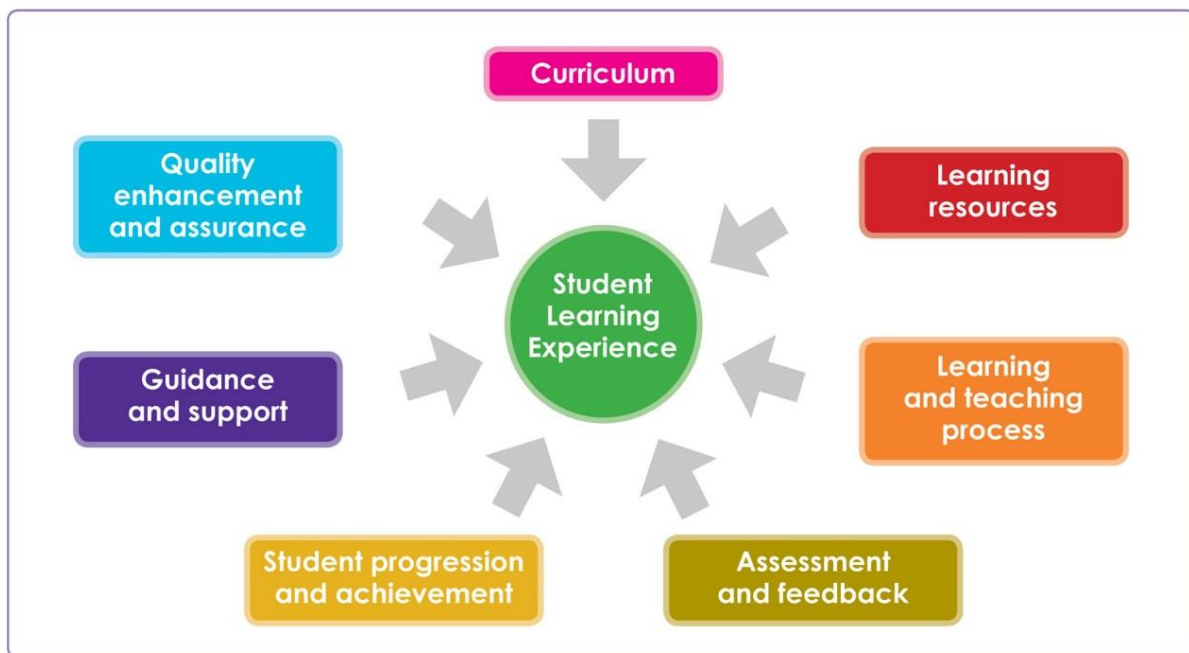
What makes this project different from traditional quality activity is that the colleges are looking in detail at the combined impact of small-scale changes in both the classroom and within college systems. Over the past two years, evidence has started to emerge about what works in which contexts and the next stage will look at how they can share their findings and approach with a wider audience.

The expectation is that colleges will see an increase in completion rates in the areas their tests have focused on. However, improving retention and attainment in the wider college sector will of course be a longer-term endeavour, requiring more systematic application of the methodology as well as an expansion in the sharing of evidence, to build an informed toolkit of improvements that the sector can be confident make a difference.

3. Your Role and Student Engagement Tools

3.1 The Student Learning Experience

The [Student Learning Experience](#) (SLE), developed by sparqs and a key component of Course Rep Training, refers to all elements of a student's experience during their time at their institution. There are seven elements: Curriculum, Learning Resources, Learning and Teaching Process, Assessment and Feedback, Student Progression and Achievement, Guidance and Support, Quality Enhancement and Assurance (*available in the Resource Library on the sparqs website*).





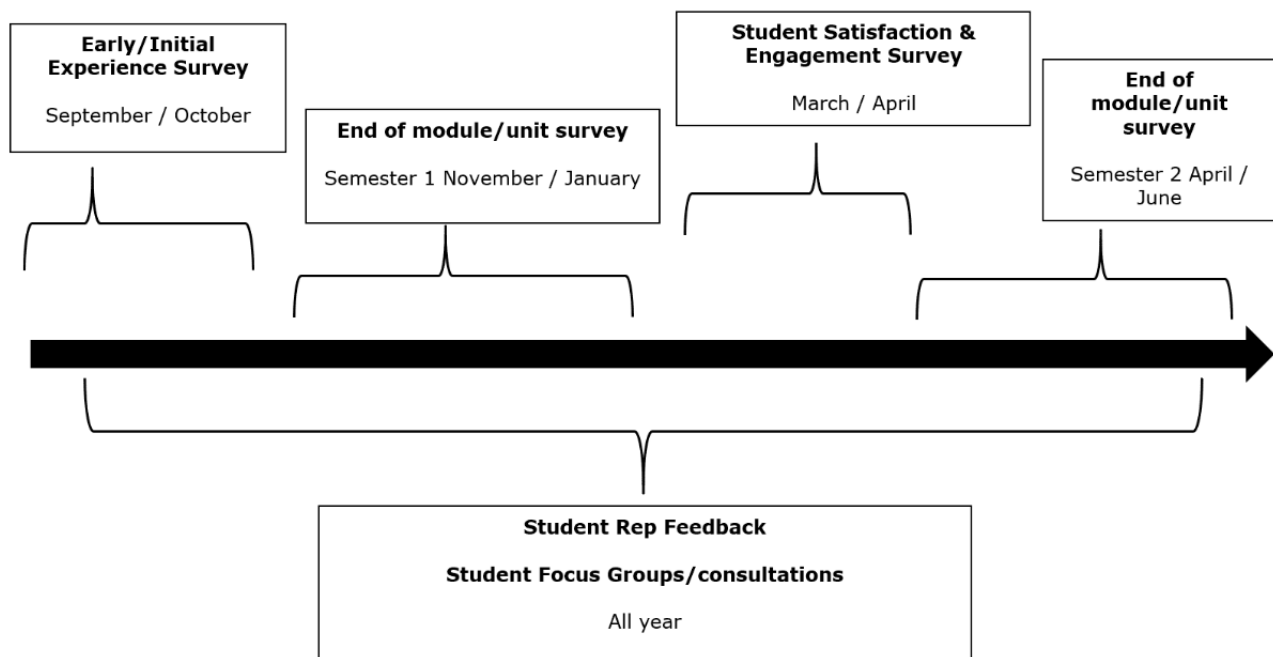
3.2 Gender Action Plans

In 2016, the SFC published its Gender Action Plan (GAP), setting out ambitious targets for tackling the long-standing problem of gender imbalance within colleges and universities. It stipulates that, by 2030, no individual subject at a Scottish college or university shall have a gender imbalance greater than 75:25, and that the gap between overall male and female participation in undergraduate study shall be reduced to 5%. Meaningful and sustained student participation throughout the GAP process is key to ensuring that colleges and universities are bold and creative in their approaches, and put the needs of their students at the centre of the process. In July 2017, each institution was required to publish a GAP, detailing its plans for meeting the SFC's targets. A review of these institutional GAPs indicated that student engagement in the process had been patchy and inconsistent, and there was significant scope for improvement.

Further information on GAPs, including SFC's initial GAP and subsequent technical report, can be found [on the SFC's GAPs webpage](#).

3.3 Surveys and Student Feedback

In your role, you will encounter a lot of different types of data, both internal data that the students' association and college collect, and external data, such as national surveys. Data, when analysed, will help you gather evidence to champion and support changes that will benefit students. It will be useful for you to understand some of the main data sources that you will encounter, considering who they are for and what their purpose is. The timeline will help you consider some of the different types of surveys and data that you will engage, however this list is by no means exhaustive, and some colleges will do things differently, such as the names or times of surveys.





<u>What</u>	<u>Survey window</u>	<u>Purpose</u>
College Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey (SSES)	8 week window between early March and end of April, during which colleges will be able to operate their survey for a period of 4 weeks.	An annual survey for college students run by the SFC. There are ten questions in the survey that relate to students' satisfaction with their college experience. The final question is about how the students' association influences change at the college. The SSES is a national approach to monitoring student satisfaction and engagement that, over time, will provide a consistent basis for college regions to evidence impact and improvement within their outcome agreements.
Early/Initial Experience Survey (or equivalent)	Around October/ November	Most colleges will run a survey shortly after the start of the 1 st semester. This will look at induction processes and initial impressions.
End of Year Survey (or equivalent)	Around March/April	This survey will ask students to reflect back on their year in relation to student satisfaction, learning and teaching and overall engagement. Many colleges choose to include the 10 SSES survey questions into their end of year survey, along with their own college-specific questions.
End of module/unit surveys	End of each semester	These are usually short surveys, issued at the end of each semester, which provide an opportunity to give direct feedback to the teaching staff on the module or unit, on things such as content, teaching methods and assessment & feedback.
Student Rep Feedback	All year	This comes in many formats. This could be the data that reps capture through consultation with their peer group and fellow classmates. It could also be the feedback from student-staff committee meetings that reps sit on, or it could be a more quantitative-based data set, such as the number of reps reporting certain issues and how that is captured, that is then used by the college or SA to make a change.
Student Focus Groups/Consultations	All year	This is where the college or students' association use consultation exercises to gather student opinion. These can be useful tools to gain insight from specific student cohorts, or about specific areas, decisions, or changes that affect your college.

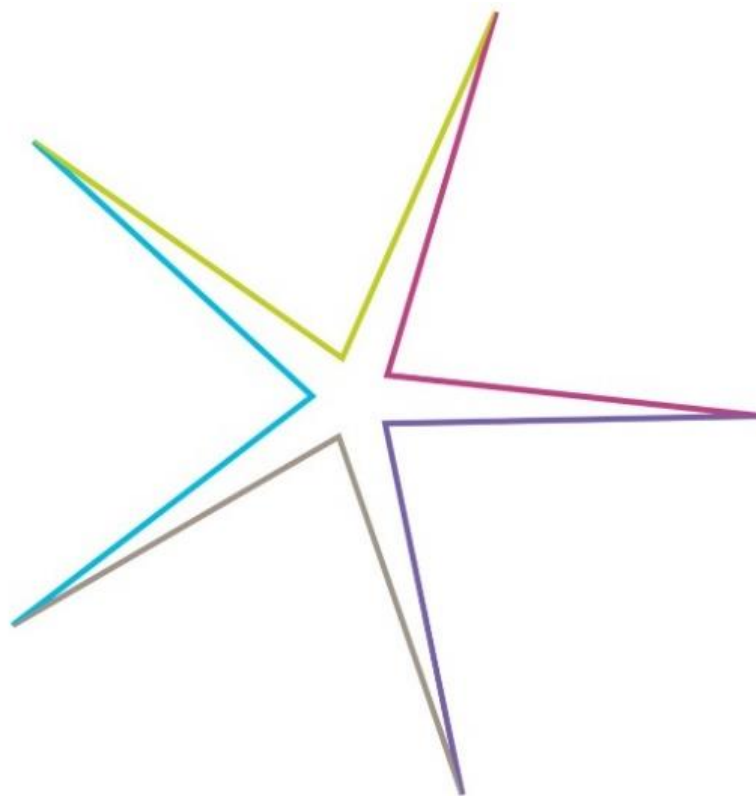


3.4 Student Representative Structures

You may be very familiar with roles such as course/class reps or lead reps - you may have even undertaken one of these roles before becoming a student officer. Student Rep systems are key to the partnership approach of Scottish institutions and are one of the most effective tools for ensuring meaningful student engagement. From courses to curriculum areas, whole institutions to nationally, rep structures support a culture of student-led evaluation, asking students to consider challenges that need addressing, as well as areas of success that others can learn from. This is the very essence of their role, and most job descriptions for student reps highlight this as the key responsibility: gathering and evaluating student opinion, developing solutions to challenges, and feeding back changes as a result.

The role of student reps has become ever more prominent in the Scottish education sector, and with this, a more respected profile for the roles and their responsibilities. Whereas once student reps may only have sat on local course-level committees, college-wide committees now have student membership as standard, and the work of national sector agencies involves students deeply. With this, student reps are playing a pivotal role in the ongoing evaluation of key learning and teaching aspects, both within their own institution but also as part of Scotland's national approach to student engagement.

At its core, the rep structure is characterised by its cyclical nature. This is true at any level of student representation, including student officers. As a student officer, you might have oversight, in conjunction with the college, over the student rep structure, and in ensuring its robustness and effectiveness to represent the student opinion. It is important you consider how your rep structure works, how it feeds into the different levels of the institution, and where there are potential gaps or opportunity for development, such as training and skills building.



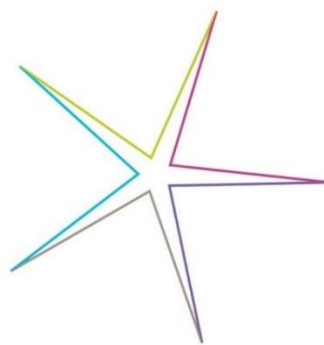


4. Additional Resources

4.1 Acronym Buster

ALO	Area Lead Officer
CDN	College Development Network
CoWA	Commission on Widening Access
CPD	Continued Professional Development
DfE	Department for Education
DYW	Developing the Young Workforce
EdS	Education Scotland
EREP	Evaluative Report and Enhancement Plan
GAP	Gender Action Plan
HGIOC	How good is our college?
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspector
KPI's	Key Performance Indicators
NUS	National Union of Students
OfS	Office for Students
PSRB	Professional, statutory or regulatory body
SAAS	Student Awards Agency for Scotland
SEF	Student Engagement Framework
SFC	Scottish Funding Council
SIMD	Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation
SLE	Student Learning Experience
SMG	Senior Management Group
SPA	Student Partnership Agreement
SSES	Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey
STM	Student Team Member
UCU	Universities & Colleges Union

Each institution will also have their own acronyms, such as SSCC (Student Staff Consultative Committee), but these will vary from institution to institution, so it is best you familiarise yourself with the ones relevant to you.





4.2 Key spargqs contacts

To email a member of staff use the following format: firstname.surname@spargqs.ac.uk

Simon Varwell, Senior Development Consultant

Colleges - all of the UHI colleges, North East Scotland College and SRUC.

Universities - Edinburgh Napier University, SRUC, The Open University in Scotland and University of the Highlands and Islands.

Hannah Clarke, Senior Development Consultant

Colleges - City of Glasgow, Glasgow Clyde and Glasgow Kelvin.

Universities - Glasgow School of Art, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, University of Glasgow and University of St Andrews.

Stef Black, Development Consultant

Colleges - Fife College, Forth Valley College, New College Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire College and West Lothian College.

Universities - Heriot-Watt University, The University of Edinburgh, University of Dundee and University of Stirling.

Megan Brown, Development Consultant

Colleges - Borders College, Dumfries & Galloway College, Edinburgh College and West College Scotland.

Universities - Glasgow Caledonian University, University of Aberdeen and University of the West of Scotland.

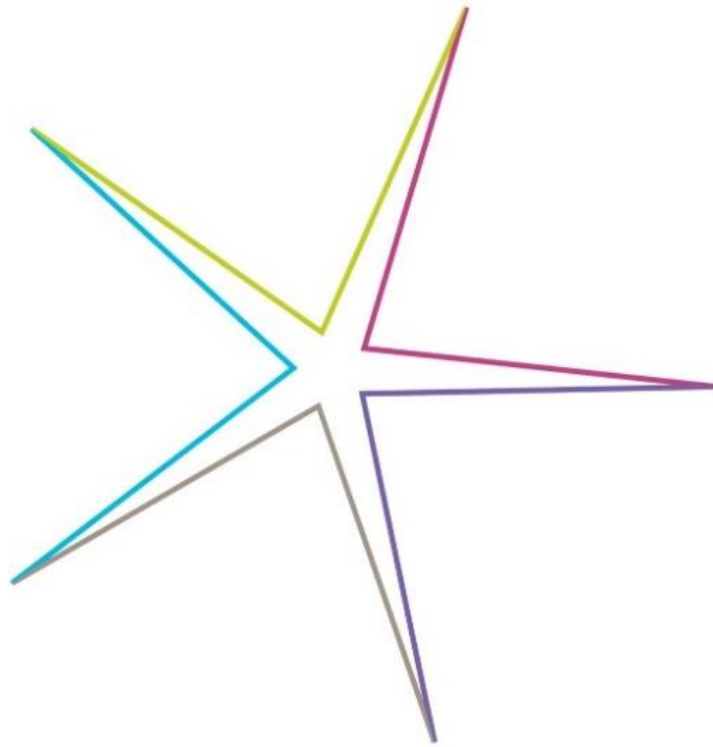
Justin Walker, Development Consultant

Colleges - Ayrshire College, Dundee and Angus College and Newbattle Abbey College.

Universities - Abertay University, Queen Margaret University, Robert Gordon University and University of Strathclyde.



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